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ABSTRACT

The author suggests that teachers of English as a second language unconsciously and unwittingly often display negative attitudes towards the language and culture of their students. These attitudes can be clothed in rather authoritarian modes of behavior. They are the products of linguistic and cultural misunderstandings on the teacher's part. It is believed that further research will measure the degree to which certain teacher behavioral patterns positively or negatively influence second language learning. The present state of classroom teaching methodology of English as a second language is such that dynamic infusions of ideas from within and from outside the field are needed. Learners of all ages and levels exhibit less willingness to tolerate the ever existent gap between mechanical practice and meaningful language usage. (Author)

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"SOME EFFECTS OF TEACHER ATTITUDES AND CURRENT METHODS UPON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS"

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ESL teachers unconsciously and unwittingly often display negative attitudes towards the language and culture of their students. These attitudes can be clothed in rather authoritarian modes of behavior. They are the products of linguistic and cultural misunderstandings on the teacher's part. It is believed further research will measure the degree towards which certain teacher behavioral patterns positively or negatively influence second language learning. The present state of classroom ESL methodology is such that dynamic infusions of ideas from within the field and from outside the field are needed. Learners of all ages and levels exhibit less willingness to tolerate the ever existent gap between mechanical practice and meaningful language usage.

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SOME EFFECTS OF TEACHER ATTITUDES AND CURRENT METHODS UPON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The entire shift in American education theory over the past few years has been toward a direction of greater student involvement in and reaction to the institutions entrusted with the responsibility for their learning. The question is not whether educators are going to pay pedagogical lip service to the more militant and demanding students by nodding their heads in assent over expressed grievances and then doing little to implement their concerns in the actual classrooms. The question is whether we as educatiors will recognize the validity of what students tell us or indicate through unresponsive classroom behavior and then make the necessary personal adjustments to insure against future re-occurrences.

ESL teachers who have accepted much of the theory expressed throughout the 1960's as to how students best learned a second language are in the position today of needing to re-assess many of these same principles and place them in a more proper perspective.

One example of this need can be found in the fundamental misunderstanding and misapplication of audio-lingual teaching techniques in the language classroom. The audio-lingual method with all of its emphasis on structuring, sequence, drill variety, immediate correction, the formation of habit responses, reward reinforcement, analogy learning and teaching the language in a cultural context is still no more than a means to a much more important end; language performance.

By performance, I mean successful language use in situations normally expected of native language speakers. This definition of language performance should not be confused with language competence which commonly denotes the speaker's critical awareness of the underlying grammatical processes which govern usage.

Stated in other terms, if the language performances registered by students does not measure up to teacher expectation levels then either the skillfulness of the teacher's handling of the technique or the applicability of it to the particular set of learners should undergo careful scrutiny.

It has been my experience in observing ESL teachers in classroom situations that all too often neither factor was analyzed after poor learner performances. I have seen teachers drill a particular pattern beyond the limit of student interest or tolerable endurance. When questioned afterwards about the fact that the students had long before "tuned out" the oft repeated reply was "Yes, I know, but its important to build up habit responses, and I can't allow student disinterest to prevent me from achieving my goal." In such an analysis, the student becomes the means to a lesser end which is perfection of teaching technique masquerading under the pretended goal of credible student linguistic performance.

In other classrooms, I have witnessed teachers complaining bitterly about the fact that some of the students in the class, successful language learners by the way, refused to participate in the structured oral activities but preferred reading from books which the teachers felt were too hard for them. Or in some cases consulted dictionaries for word definitions.

The teachers were afraid that the reading of materials not previously introduced orally would affect correct pronunciation and that the constant use of dictionary word translation would only impede their learning of the English meanings through a separate language context.

I was amazed to learn that the teachers really believed that the only practice and experimentation the students did with reading the written word took place in the classroom and that the whole world of visual reality outside the classroom was oblivious to them. I was further surprised by their statements of annoyance at the use of translation via dictionaries but their apparent indifference towards the fact that when an English word was explained to the students through explanation, gestures or visual aids, the students immediately copied down the native language equivalent.

Another common misapplication of audio-lingual technique made by some teachers is its uses in stages of language development where oral facility has been achieved and the primary emphasis should be on the written form. This practice takes the shape of orally structuring to a fine detail points in an advanced ESL class which the students would probably learn far quicker given the opportunity for grammatical experimentation and analysis rather than oral response drill.

The cause of this problem is the teacher's failure to understand what constitutes a natural teaching transition from the oral to the written language form and from stimulus-response learning theory to more cognitive development oriented learning theories.

Perhaps these errors in teacher judgements could be avoided if in the future we spend the time in our teacher training seminars to explain the nature of oral language development teaching including its most appropriate and inappropriate uses with respect to stages in general learning growth and student attitude orientation.

In short, the language teacher should be led to see that what he does in the classroom is connected in many different and often disjointed ways to a larger process or theory of language learning.

When changes in the process are discovered or offered for experimentation, he must be willing and capable of making the necessary adjustments in his own teaching lest he be left with a practical reconstruct of a theory which is no longer based on a valid scientific foundation.

In observing ESL classrooms, there are two essential attitudes or qualities, if you like, which seem to separate the truly effective from the largely ineffective teachers. The first is the teacher's ability to move from a stage of mechanical classroom practice to one of meaningful performance in situational contexts. The teacher can never lose sight of the fact that he is preparing students for experiences outside of the classroom in which they will be expected to "perform" in the oral or written form of the language.

The second distinguishing quality of a successful ESL teacher is a desire to move steadily and perceptibly from a position of sole classroom arbitrator to one of behavioral observer. As the teacher assumes a less central identity role in the classroom, his students chances for linguistic independence increase. He must initiate classroom action by introducing material and providing necessary explanations. But as the students begin the oral or written practice, his role becomes one of relinquishing the limelight and allowing students to control the learning center. Two purposes are served: (1) The teacher as observer has a better opportunity to study the behavioral reactions of students to the language material being presented and make adjustments accordingly. (2) The less time spent by the teacher in explaining or drilling, the more exposure time allotted to students for language production and contextual usage.

Ronald Wardaugh in addressing a TESOL convention two years ago said,

"If our goal is somehow to help out students to acquire an adequate control of that second language, then the focus must be changed from the teacher to the student. Somehow we have to realize that the student must do the job for himself, that we can help him, that we can struggle with him in his task of learning a second language, but that since we know so little about that second language, we can provide little more than encouragement and a certain, but not unimportant, amount of help." (Wardaugh, 1969)

Fortunately one attitudinal trait often noticed in the public schools I have visited - the tendency to berate students in the halls and classrooms for using their native language - occurs less frequently now - perhaps because of the growing acceptance of bilingual education in this country.

Be it in a TESOL program or a bilingual program, the ESL teacher's goal is not to replace a student's first language with a second language; but rather to complement the student's native language with a second form of communication. Teachers must convey to students the message that language is situational and often governed by social circumstances.

Telling Hispanic students to go home and speak English in an environment which is totally non-English speaking is just as impractical as demanding that all monolingual ESL teachers be fluent in Spanish before teaching English to Spanish speakers. It is the appropriateness of the the social circumstances which dictate the language to be used not subjectively arrived at teacher value judgements.

While many teachers in the past preferred a perfunctory assent to bilingualism, they behaved in a most contradictory fashion once inside the classroom. One does not foster in students a reciprocal appreciation for the target language being learned by screaming all day "No Spanish is to be spoken in here."

In essence, the teacher is unwittingly encouraging monolingualism in the Spanish speakers whereas at the same time he would in all likelihood support bilingualism for the native English speaker taking a foreign language in the same school.

While exposure to the second language is a necessary and linguistically valid reason for stipulating that only English be used within the classroom confines, students can easily equate teacher insistence with cultural prejudice. It behooves the teacher to definitively explain why he wants English spoken only and not allow students to make assessments on the basis of declarative statements alone.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR

I would like to shift the perspective of my paper now to the topic of student behaviors in the ESL classroom. We know that at the heart of much student-teacher conflict in education today is the over-riding notion of "choice" or "who does the choosing for whom". It is perhaps sad that in a field where very little is definitely known about how one learns a language (first or second) or which method facilitates the learning process best, that not more evidence exists of classroom and student-centered experimentation taking place.

The situation is further complicated by the wide variance in student attitudes towards language learning. Some students wholly identify with the speakers of the "target" language and make a linguistic and cultural commitment to be assimilated. Others are goaded by more instrumental less integrative objectives. (Anisfeld, 1961, Lambert, 1965, Gardner, 1968) To them of primary importance is the achieving of economic independence or the obtaining of a high school diploma, or of being extended the same social mobility accorded to native speakers. All areas reflect goal achievement vis a vis student performance proximity to native language usage.

It should seem apparent by today 1971 that a student's psychological orientation towards another language and culture has a direct effect upon what he learns, how quickly he learns it, and which teaching approach will stimulate his growth best.

Even when we group our classes according to demonstrated linguistic performances, there is a wide range of subverted student desires which never manifest themselves at the surface level because the learner is never consulted as to the course or direction of his own education.

Instead, out of administrative convenience, he is assigned to one of the proverbial "beginners", "intermediate" or "advanced" classes. Granted, for many students who have not decided upon eventual goals, placement in one of the three classes may serve their present purposes.

But what of the woman who desires nothing more than to pick up an American newspaper and read through the shopping sections and the classified ads. Are her goals being satisfied when she is told that she must first learn to speak the language correctly before being given reading instruction? Isn't it possible that she has adapted to functioning quite well in her native language and has no real need or desire to learn spoken English?

What about the gentleman with an acquired technical background from his native country in auto mechanics, or printing or carpentry and whose main need is to learn an equivalent vocabulary for the same words and operations he is already familar with in his native language?

Are we serving his interests and insuring his eventual linguistic success by placing him in a given language level class instead of satisfying what he really needs to know?

Why is it that the individualized expressed needs of the second language learner cannot be accommodated into the existing education framework? Cost? I think not - for needs could be met far better without resorting to greatly increased budgets if schools re-shifted their thinking and deployed personnel and potential resources more effectively.

The cost factor rationale seems to be outweighed by a general philosophical intransigence on the part of many otherwise perceptive intelligent school policy makers who fear the possible shifts in power alliances, i.e., School-Community interest group, Teacher-Student, and the ensuing emotion-tinged debates far more than they do either experiment or change as neutral objectives. In the area of classroom behaviors, until we take a chance, experiment with and deviate from the tradition oriented teacher-learner roles, we can never be sure of what these roles might come to be.

At the present time, there are three essential viewpoints to the teacher-student classroom relationship. The first and least effective of these is taken by the teacher who justifies his position to the students vis a vis established roles. Example: "I have been hired to teach that is why you will learn."

A second viewpoint is maintained by the instructor who gains the student's respect by being expert or particularly competent in his chosen profession - for the purposes of our discussion - language teaching.

The final perspective is held by the teacher who demonstrates control and his right to teach not through established position or through academic expertise but rather via <u>educational reciprocity</u>. This occurs when both student and instructor respect the human dignity of each other and honestly believe that much is to be gained by entering into a joint person-person learning experience. (Benne, 1970)

The crux of the matter is that we as educators cannot motivate our students into learning a second language until we discover from them or help them to discover for themselves a personal estimate of what is important. (Rivers, 1964)

Foreign-born students know all too well that the majority of people in their newly arrived country do not speak their language. They are more interested in finding a specific personal reason for why they should learn English than in being told why people from previous generations and for wholly different motivational reasons chose to learn English.

We tend to mistake enthusiasm, cooperation and interest with the motivation of students. All too often the student who sits the most attentively and seems to try the most earnestly learns the least. He has accepted the outer dictates of the teacher and manifests passive behavior but he has not discovered an inner personal reason for why he should learn English. True classroom motivation is the acceptance or recognition of the importance of what is being taught.

When a majority of individual students collectively agree that what is being taught is important, the teacher can maintain a productive classroom environment. A teacher achieves concensus only by inspiring and encouraging individual class members to discover a personally satisfying choice among the many reasons for why one would want to learn a second language. In many cases, the sheer enjoyment of the ESL class is reason enough for many formerly irresolute students to decide in favor of learning English. Most linguists have rejected the traditional grammarians prescriptive method of language analysis. Why can't the methodologists follow a similar tact and analyze the learner at where he is - not where they would find him the most convenient to be?

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